



LESSON 14: HOW CAN I SAY THANKS?

PSALM 116

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 116 is a personal song of praise and thanksgiving to God. It celebrates the writer's deliverance from a difficult experience that caused him great distress. We don't know for sure who the author is, but this Psalm could be written by any of us. We can all relate to crying out to God in the midst of a difficult and distressing situation. God lovingly and mercifully responds to our suffering and delivers us. With deep gratitude, we wonder, "How can I say thanks"?

When Sybil Towner taught on **Psalm 103** at our large group meeting in February, she stressed the importance of letting God's Word *read us*, instead of us trying to *read and master* the content of God's Word. Sybil had us do an ancient practice called *lectio divina* (divine or sacred reading).

Lectio divina is a slow, contemplative reading of Scripture which enables us to have a *personal encounter* with God as he speaks to us through his Word. Using this method, we present the ears and eyes of our hearts to God as we *listen* and *look* for what he is saying to us. It is a wonderful way of helping you hear God's personal words to YOU!

In this lesson, we will practice the method that Sybil taught us in each of the three sections of **Psalm 116**. Do the exercises of *reading, listening and responding* before you answer the questions for each section. Hearing God and letting his words speak to your heart is always worth the time and effort you put into it. This method of reading can be used with any portion of Scripture. It is a way to help God's Word come alive and active in your life.

DISCUSSION STARTER

- When has a friend or family member helped you through a difficult experience?
- What are some of the ways we express our gratitude to people who help us?

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **Psalm 116**, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth (John 16:13). We have been using the prayer, *Holy Spirit, think through me until your ideas become my ideas*, or King David's prayer, *Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law*.
2. Read **Psalm 116** slowly and thoughtfully in at least two translations. Which translation do you prefer for this Psalm? Why?
3. If this Psalm were divided into 3 sections or stanzas, where would you make the divisions?
4. Summarize **Psalm 116** in a title.

QUESTIONS

Slowly read Psalm 116:1-4. In your Bible or on the Scripture handout, mark, underline or circle any word, phrase or sentence that seems to connect with your heart as you read.

Read the verses again and then write or draw below a thought or response to something you have marked.

Read the verses again. Quiet your heart and listen to any *thoughts or impressions* that come to you. Write or draw what *you think God is saying to you*. Make it personal! If you choose to write an impression, write it as if God were writing you a personal note and begin the note with your name. Don't be concerned about whether these are actually God's words to you; just write what you *think* God might be saying. (Use the back of the page if you need to.)

5. **Psalm 116** begins with a simple, forthright statement. What reasons does the psalmist give for loving God? **116:1-2**

♥ Are these good reasons? Why or why not?

6. How does **Psalm 116:1-2** echo **1 John 4:19**?

7. If asked, what three reasons would you give for loving God? Write your answer by finishing this sentence, "God, I love you because . . ."

♥ Is your devotion to God based on what he has done for you? Why or why not?

♥ Can you make the same promise that the psalmist does in **116:2**? Why or why not?

8. What word pictures does the psalmist use to describe his distress? **116:3**

♥ From the images and descriptions the psalmist uses, speculate about some situations or circumstances that might have caused his distress.

♥ When was a time in your life that the psalmist feelings could have described your feelings too?

9. What did the psalmist do when he was in distress? **116:4**

What is the first thing you usually do when you are in distress? (Be honest!)

♥ If you call on God when you are in trouble, do you really expect him to save you? Why or why not?

Slowly read Psalm 116:5-11. In your Bible or on the Scripture handout, mark, underline or circle any word, phrase or sentence that seems to connect with your heart as you read.

Read the verses again and then write or draw below a thought or response to something you have marked.

Read the verses again. Quiet your heart and listen to any thoughts or impressions that come to you. Write or draw what *you think God is saying to you*. Don't forget to make it personal!

10. How does the psalm-writer describe God in **116:5**?

Write your own description of God based on his actions towards you in the last couple of weeks.

11. According to **116:6**, what kind of person does God protect?
Why do you think this is so?

♥ In what areas of your life do you think you are simplehearted (having child-like faith)? In what areas of your life do you resist being like this? What can you do to change?

12. What inner condition is a consequence of God's goodness to us? **116:7**

♥ How would you explain and describe this inner condition to someone?

♥ How important to you is this inner condition? How often do you experience it?

13. Read **Jeremiah 6:16** and **Matthew 11:28-29**. What are some specific things you can do to experience soul rest?

♥ Who else or what else do you sometimes look to for soul rest? Do you attain it?

14. From what specific things will God deliver us? **116:8**

What does God give us in exchange? (**116:9**, especially in *The Message*)

Describe a time that God made this exchange for you.

Slowly read Psalm 116:12-19. In your Bible or on the Scripture handout, mark, underline or circle any word, phrase or sentence that seems to connect with your heart as you read.

Read the verses again and then write or draw below a thought or response to something you have marked.

Read the verses again. Quiet your heart and listen to any thoughts or impressions that come to you. Write or draw what *you think God is saying to you*. Don't forget to make it personal!

15. Because God heard and responded to his cry for help, what does the psalmist desire to do? (116:12, read in all four translations)

Thanksgiving - The offering of thanks, especially for gifts received. Scripture emphasizes the importance of giving thanks to God for all his gifts and works, both as an expression of our dependence upon him and our gratitude to him. Gratitude is the *thankful awareness* that all good things come from God. We can acknowledge God's goodness by expressing praise or by bringing a sacrifice.

16. What specific things did the psalmist plan to do as an expression of his gratitude? 116:1, 2, 13-14, 17-19

♥ With which of these expressions do you most identify? Why?

Cup of Salvation - During Hebrew religious ceremonies, a cup of wine was lifted to God as an expression of thanksgiving. The psalm-writer celebrates God's goodness in saving him and publicly acknowledges his gratitude. **Thank offerings** - Thank offerings were brought to the temple to express gratitude to God for deliverance from trouble, healing of sickness, answers to prayer or some other blessing. *Quest Bible*

- ♥ How can you publicly acknowledge your gratitude to God or what "thank offering" can you give him?
- ♥ What vows (baptismal, marriage, church, private) have you made to God and are you keeping them?
- ♥ Why is gratitude and thanksgiving an appropriate way to "give back" to God? What effect does thanksgiving have on the one who gives it?
- ♥ Read 116:15 in all four translations. What does this verse tell you about God's feelings toward you?

17. How will *you* answer the question in 116:12? (You may want to consider 1 Corinthians 10:16; Psalm 95:2; 1 Timothy 2:1; 2 Corinthians 9:11-12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18 for some ideas.)

RESPONSE:

Consider keeping a **Gratitude Journal**. Daily record in a notebook three blessings or gifts from God for which you want to thank him. Remember, *every* good gift in your life is from God (James 1:17). Keeping a **Gratitude Journal** will train your heart to look for God's goodness and to express thanksgiving to him. You cannot do this exercise and remain unchanged. This is also a wonderful thing to do as a family or with your children. For children, looking for God's goodness is like a treasure hunt and it will cultivate in them an attitude of thanksgiving as well as teach them that God is the source of all good things.